

PILGRIM STATION

Chronology of 2013 leaks, events

By Frank Mand

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PLYMOUTH – Oftentimes the reaction of officials at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and Entergy, the owners of Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station, to “events” at the plant on Rocky Hill Road is the technical equivalent of a shrug.

Often, the jargon-filled descriptions of these events conclude with the assertion that, at no time was the public’s safety or the reactor’s integrity at risk.

And yet, if there were a point system similar to that utilized by the Registry of Motor Vehicles, it would seem the plant might have already earned enough points in 2013 alone, to risk a license revocation.

The following is a list of the announced events that have occurred at the plant this year, compiled by Mary “Pixie” Lampert, a longtime critic of the plant and the founder of Pilgrim Watch.

Jan. 10 – Event 48664: recirculation pumps tripped

“Both recirculation pumps tripped automatically,” Lampert writes, “for as yet undisclosed reasons. The pumps can both trip due to common signal. A false sense of high pressure or something likely

caused both pumps to trip Jan. 12 – hostile action, duck hunters

This “shows absurdity of only having sticks in the water saying no trespassing,” Lampert said. There were also two other intrusions on to the plant’s grounds in the last few years, including a Norwegian boat and another vessel, in 2011.

Jan. 14 – bottom head drain valve leak

Jan. 21 – safety relief pilot valve leak

March 3 – Event 48801: 24-hour notification of inoperable scram discharge volume valve

April 10 – Event: 48909: break in the neutralizing sump discharge line

This line discharges contaminated water from the reactor into the bay but only, the NRC says, “after the concentration of any radioactivity in the liquid has been checked and is within allowable limits.” In this case however, for an indeterminate amount of time, liquid was leaking into the ground and out of an electrical junction box.

April 14 – Event 48923: Scram

A manual reactor scram was inserted due to reactor pressure lowering beyond established control bands. At

the time of the manual reactor scram PNPS was conducting a planned reactor shutdown. This was the second consecutive scram associated with the plant’s planned shutdown or restart of the plant as part of the biennial refueling process.

April 14 – Event 48924: primary containment air lock failed integrated leak rate test

The key phrase in the announcement of this event, shown below, is “personnel air lock.”

“On Sunday, April 14, 2013, at 2216 hours, with the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station (PNPS) Reactor Mode Select Switch (RMSS) in start-up, the turbine generator previously removed from service, and the reactor sub-critical on Intermediate Range Monitors Range 2 and lowering, the PNPS Containment Personnel Air Lock failed integrated air lock testing as required by TS 4.7.A.2. 10CFR50 Appendix J requires that primary reactor containment meet certain leakage rate testing requirements. These test requirements ensure that 1) leakage through the containment or systems and components penetrating the containment do not exceed allowable leakage rates specified in technical specifications and 2) the

integrity of the containment structure is maintained during its service life. The test requirements include local leakage rate testing of containment air locks. The test criteria establishes a limit of less than or equal to 10.525 SLM, actual leakage was 16.7 SLM.

Has Pilgrim had a sufficiently bad year, to date, that the NRC could justifiably call for special measures pending a review of its procedures and efficacy? No: The NRC has a process.

“Initiating Event performance indicators are used by the NRC to track licensee performance in the area of plant upsets,” Neil Sheehan said. “For example, the number of unplanned scrams in 7,000 hours of critical operation is tracked and reactive inspections are conducted if this number exceeds predetermined values.”

That hasn’t happened, yet, with Pilgrim, Neil Sheehan said, but “for each plant event that has occurred, our resident inspectors responded to evaluate the company’s performance and safety equipment operation. These event responses are discussed in the resident inspector quarterly reports for the plant, most recently the first quarter 2013 report soon to be issued.”

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